

# NIGHTSHADE FAMILY ALBUM

## SOLANACEAE

### A Dark Name Serves as a Warning

The Solanaceae or nightshade family, containing some of the most widely used (and misused) plants, is known for its potent chemistry. Some nightshade species produce unique and powerful “belladonna alkaloids,” including atropine, hyoscyamine, and scopolamine. While there are therapeutic, medicinal uses for these compounds, their use as hallucinogens can cause dire results: sweating, dizziness, irregular heartbeat, and sometimes even coma or death. Other nightshade compounds are highly addictive, e.g., the nicotine found in the tobacco plant (*Nicotiana tabacum*).

In the Renaissance, the plant known as belladonna (Italian for “beautiful lady”), *Atropa belladonna*, was used to dilate the pupils of the eyes to enhance their beauty. The plant’s active compound, atropine, is still used to dilate the pupils for an eye exam and to treat

certain heart conditions. Belladonna is also an antidote for insecticide poisoning and nerve gas.

Despite the sinister reputation of the family, Solanaceae is also home to many safe and delicious garden plants—such as tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants, and peppers—as well as popular flowers such as petunias.



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